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ABSTRACT

The classical concept of "ethos" (the establishing of the speaker or writer's credibility, his or her moral character) has acquired many meanings over the centuries and has played an important role in determining the many shifting perceptions of the teacher's role, both in the classical period and the modern period. The issue can be reduced to this one classical concept, and the dialectic pair that overshadows it--philosopher and moderator. A moderator may be seen as a teacher who monitors students' acquisition of persuasive skills, without concern for the moral implications of the students' use of the material or techniques they are being taught. A philosopher teaches rhetorical skills, but also supplies students with a moral model, and teaches the truth. The original dichotomy between the role of the teacher as philosopher or moderator began with the schism that developed between the followers of Socrates, perhaps the original philosophical educator, and Gorgias, who is often portrayed as the penultimate sophist. The views of Plato, Gorgias, Isocrates, Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian illustrate a range of opinions regarding this issue. The voices of current theorists convey equally strong opinions concerning the writing teacher's role. All teachers have their own ethos and only they can determine what ethical stance is best for them. But it is a position that must be questioned rather than blindly acquired. (SR)

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Kathryn Rosser Raign

Philosopher to Moderator: The Shifting Paradigm of Ethos in Education

In this age of single parent families, and double income families, there must be an increased concern for the morals of our children. Children learn from the people they are with, and they are with their teachers for the majority of their day for a minimum of twelve years--often much more if they attend college. So who is supplying these children with their moral models? Their parents, yes--but also their teachers. This is especially true of teachers of writing because it must be ackowledged that writing necessarily involves the practice of ethics. We know it is wrong to separate writing from thinking. Isn't it equally wrong to separate teaching from ethics? This is a question that many teachers seem to feel it is unnecessary to consider, as is evidenced by many of the teaching methods currently practiced. In fact, in the rush to study how people write and why and when, the study of how teachers teach has largely fallen to the side.

In an article in College English, Lad Tobin said that:

> In the traditional writing class the writing teacher played several roles--provider of information, lecturer, upholder of standards, corrector--but each was relatively static, unilateral: the teacher provided the students with rules and models of good writing and then graded them accordingly. . . . Not only did this role fail to reflect the complexity and pleasure of the

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> writer, it failed to acknowledge the intelligence, creativity, and interests of the teacher. (338)

I was recently made aware of how little most instructors of rhetoric and composition do contemplate their role in the classroom when I ran into a colleague of mine and we began discussing the teaching of rhetorical fallacies.

Winifred Horner's text, Rhetoric in the Classical Tradition, defines the fallacies as: "the way arguments can go wrong" (10). More specifically, "material fallacies have to do with the subject matter of the argument . . . If the basic premises are untrue then the conclusion will be untrue" (207).

It is generally understood that it is the job of the writing instructor to not only teach the fallacies, but to teach that using the fallacies is, in itself, fallacious. My colleague does teach her students to recognize the fallacies; however, she also teaches them to use them to their own benefit. As far as she is concerned, the ends justify the means. She feels that if a writer has a persuasive point to make on a significant subject, he or she should make that point using any available means--including the use of fallacious arguments, depending upon his or her ethos to gain them belief.

This instructor is what many scholars (though certainly not scholars of rhetoric) would call a "rhetorician"--the person a classical philosopher such as Plato warned against. Or to adopt another term--a moderator--someone who monitors the students' education objectively and without concern for the moral

implications of the students' use of the material or techniques they are being taught. Tobin in turn, refers to such teachers as "facilitators (as if they have no agenda of their own . . ." (338).

Horner sums up the issue well when she stresses to writing students, "The final question, then, for both classical orators and modern writers remains: Have I presented myself as a person of good character? Am I using rhetoric for a good purpose?" (56) But is this the final question for orators or teachers? And what is signified by the choice of the word "presented." Is it necessary only to <u>appear</u> to be a good person, not to actually <u>be</u> one?

This ethical argument is certainly based on the classical concept of <u>ethos</u>--the establishing of the speaker or writer's credibility--his or her moral character, which is one of the three forms of artistic proof: <u>logos</u>, <u>pathos</u>, <u>ethos</u>. According to Aristotle:

> Persuasion is achieved by the speaker's personal character when the speech is so spoken as to make us think him credible. We believe good men more fully and more readily than others; this is true generally whatever the question is, and absolutely true where exact certainty is impossible and opinions divided. (1.1356a 4-9)

This apparently simple term, however, has acquired many meanings over the centuries and has played an important role in

determining the many shifting perceptions of the teacher's role. The entire issue, then, can be reduced to one classical concept, ethos, and the dialectic pair that overshadows it--philosopher or moderator.

This dichotomy is paralleled in teaching methods of the classical period and the modern period. Educators in both periods defined and define themselves on the basis of this dialectical pair, and the trend is increasing today as the tenets of classical rhetoric are once more coming to dominate the realm of the teaching of writing. This paper, then, will survey the shifting educational paradigm of ethos during the classical period as evidenced by the many definitions of ethos, and will then touch upon those definitions currently in use for the purpose of postulating what the role of the teacher is--philosopher or moderator, not because it claims to be able to answer this question, but because the asking is so essential to the profession itself.

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The original dichotomy between the role of the teacher as philosopher or moderator began with the schism that developed between the followers of Socrates, perhaps the original philosophical educator, and Gorgias, who is often portrayed as the penultimate sophist.

According to Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg, "Plato defines the philosopher's task as aiding others to remember by

clearing away the worldly debris that obscures the truth, or, to use the metaphor Socrates advances in Plato's Theaetetus, the philosopher is a midwife who aids the other mind to bring forth those true ideas hidden in its secret place before its birth" (5). Contrapuntally, Plato believed the rhetorician's role was quite different. Plato has Socrates ask Gorgias in the Gorgias:

> . . . is it necessary to know [what is just or unjust], and must anyone who intends to learn rhetoric have a previous knowledge of these things when he comes to you? Or if not, are you the teacher of rhetoric, to teach the person who comes to you nothing about them--for it is not your business--but only to make him appear in the eyes of the multitude to know things of this sort when he does not know, and to appear to be good when he is not? (69).

Clearly, Plato believed that the sophists were merely moderators who taught their students nothing of truth, but only monitored their acquisition of persuasive skills--the tool of rhetoric if you will. He again supports this opinion in the Phaedrus, saying of Lysias:

> . . . make him to cease from such speeches, and turn him, as his brother Polemarchus is turned, toward philosophy, that his lover Phaedrus may no longer hesitate, as he does now, between two ways, but may direct his life with singleness of purpose toward love and philosophical discourse. (129)

Plato, then, resented those teachers who were not philosophers and whom he felt led their students away from the pursuit of truth. He is not insinuating that the art of speaking [writing] cannot be taught; in fact, he believes speech herself would have answered the philosopher's criticism against her practice by rhetoricians in this way: " I do not compel anyone my advice is of any value, he learns that first and then acquires me. So what I claim is this, that without my help the knowledge of the truth does not give the art of persuasion (131)."

Gorgias, himself a sophist of renown, would not have disagreed with Plato's description of his teaching methods because he did believe the role of the teacher to be that of the moderator who removed himself morally from the teaching situation. He was not alone in this decision, however.

It appears, according to Bizzell and Herzberg:

> that the participants in the Sophistic movement saw themselves as philosophers in the classical sense--that, concerned with virtually all human knowledge and conduct. . . . for the Sophists, distinctions among the roles of philosopher, rhetorician, and poet . . . were blurred. (22)

This attitude of the Sophists was based on their lack of belief in the existence of ultimate truth in the Platonic sense. Gorgias felt that "provisional knowledge is the only knowledge we can attain. Therefore, if we are to believe anything, we must be distracted from the limitations of provisional knowledge. It

must be presented to us ethically and pathetically as well as logically--to appeal to our whole person" (38). Gorgias was a practical man who taught his students what he felt was possible--probable truth, appearances. Consequently, he was not bounded by a moralistic need to serve truth and justice. He provided the knowledge, but he did not provide a code for applying it. He taught his students to appear ethical, but he did not attempt to teach them what he believed it was not possible to teach--to be ethical.

Isocrates had no misconceptions concerning his role as a teacher. He faulted both the philosophers and the sophists. He claimed that the philosophers who profess that power [the ability to teach others to be good not just appear good] will grow weary and cease from their vain pretensions before such an education is ever found." (337). Furthermore, he believed philosophers, lack scruples because they "have gone so far . . . that they attempt to persuade our young men that if they will only study under them they will know what do in life and through this knowledge become happy and prosperous" (165). On the other hand, the sophists, "have no interest whatever in the truth, but consider that they are masters of the art if they can attract great numbers of students . . . and get something out of them."

Isocrates himself believed the role of the teacher was "to expound the principles of the art with the utmost possible exactness as to leave out nothing that can be taught, and for the rest, he must in himself set such an example of oratory that the

students who have taken form under his instruction . . . are able to pattern after him . . . and show grace and charm . . . not found in others" (175). Isocrates then, had no respect for the philosophers who professed to teach a truth he did not believe existed. Neither, however, did he support the sophists whom he condemned for teaching solely for financial gain with no thought of truth or morality.

Isocrates believed it was unnecessary for the teacher to instruct his or her students in ethics, and furthermore he "consider[ed] that the kind of art which can implant honesty and justice in depraved natures has never existed and does not now exist" (337). This did not mean that Isocrates felt that rhetoricians, including teachers of rhetoric themselves must not be morally good. Rather he believed it was not necessary for a teacher to attempt to teach such a study because a speaker would never be successful unless he or she was good. For "if one is under the impression that people . . . who do any evil thing get the advantage, he is wrong in his thinking; for none are found in more difficult straits." (341).

Consequently, Isocrates saw the teacher as a moderator. To be anything else was to falsely attempt to do what could not be done. This was not, however, to indicate that the teacher should not be a good person. Only a skilled rhetorician can successfully teach others to be skilled, and only a good man can be skilled in rhetoric. Consequently, the teaching of morality not only becomes unnecessary, but in Isocrate's view impossible.

Aristotle, despite his philosophical training, took a very pragmatic approach toward teaching. He ackowledged that the study of rhetoric could not be separated from the study of philosophy, yet only where subject matter, not the morality of the speaker was concerned. Yes, rhetoric is the counterpart of dialectic, but not because both involve the search for truth--because both deal with "such things as come, more or less, within the general ken of all men and belong to no definite science" (151). Aristotle taught his students that:

> the character of the speaker is a cause of persuasion when the speech is so uttered as to make him worthy of belief. . . . This trust, however, should be created by the speech itself, and not left to depend upon an antecedent impression that the speaker is this or that kind of man. (1.2.1)

What is paramount to Aristotle, apparently then, is that the speaker <u>appear</u> to be of good character--persuasion at all costs. The same attitude that was present in the passage quoted earlier: "Persuasion is achieved by the speaker's personal character when the speech is so spoken as to make us think him credible" (1.1.1356a 4-9). He is not saying that the speaker must be good or even should be good; he is saying the speech should make him <u>seem</u> to be good.

It was this type of attitude which was denigrated by Plato, and would have been refuted by Isocrates. Because though Isocrates did not believe it was possible to teach virtue, he

would not have condoned teaching students that the ends always justify the means. Though possibly, it could be concluded that Aristotle, like Isocrates, believed that it was not the job of the teacher to attempt to instill morality in his students--if they wished to be successful, they would be forced to honesty; otherwise, their lack of scruples would cause their downfall.

Cicero defines ethos this way:

> The ethos which I have in my mind and which I desiderate in an orator is commended to our approval by goodness more than aught else. . . . ethos in its forms requires the speaker to be a man of good character and courtesy (VI.II. 13, 18).

Cicero further believed, as Aristotle did, that rhetoric and consequently, ethos is a branch of moral philosophy; however, Cicero, unlike Aristotle, believed that more than just subject matter was affected by this bridging of what many considered two separate studies:

> . . . In the old days at all events the same system of instruction seems to have imparted education both in right conduct and in good speech; nor were the professors in two separate groups, but the same masters gave instruction both in ethics and in rhetoric, . . . Socrates . . . in his discussions separated the science of wise thinking from that of elegant speaking, though in reality they are closely linked together; . . . This is the source from which has sprung the undoubtedly

> absurd and unprofitable and reprehensible severance between the tongue and the brain, leading to our having one set of professors to us to think and another to teach us to speak. (247).

Now Cicero's apparent emphasis on the need for the ethos of goodness to be based on more than appearance, and on the teacher's role as philosopher rather than just moderator appears to be contradicted in the instruction he gives regarding the use of ethos when speaking:

> . . . so much is done by good taste and style in speaking, that the speech seems to depict the speaker's character. For by means of particular types of thought and diction, and the employment besides of a good delivery that is unruffled and eloquent of good-nature, the speakers are made <u>to appear</u> upright, well-bred and virtuous men. (240)

On the one hand, we have Cicero stating the complete inappropriateness of separating the teaching of morals from the teaching of rhetoric, and here we have him claiming that the rhetorician need only <u>appear</u> to be good. Obviously, Cicero felt training in morals is not necessary in order to appear good; As Aristotle attested, a knowledge of rhetoric can supply that. So how is the contradiction resolved? Actually, despite the obvious interpretation of his words, Cicero did not believe a man who only appeared to be good could be a successful orator:

> . . . in my own case there is no reason why I should

> lie to men of consummate experience, who are also my best friends: I give you my word that I never tried by means of a speech, to arouse [emotion] in the minds of the tribunal, without being really stirred myself. (241)

Thus, there is similarity between Cicero's views and those of Isocrates, with one definite contradiction. Despite the fact that Cicero believed a rhetorician who was not truly a good man speaking the truth would never be as successful as the good orator, which would lead one to conclude that Cicero would have felt it unnecessary to teach ethics, he obviously did find it necessary and faulted the current system which stressed the separation of rhetoric and philosophy. To Cicero, knowledge of ethical issues and morality were closely related. And though he may have believed that right would necessarily triumph over evil, he like Plato and Socrates before him, did not believe that this relieved the teacher from an ethical obligation to do more than present students with a tool of persuasion. The good teacher was not merely a moderator who instilled knowledge; he or she also instilled a sense of the moral obligation that accompanies the acquisition of a tool.

It was Quintilian who made the strongest statement concerning the ethos of the rhetorician. It was commonly accepted that an orator should be a good man skilled in speaking. Yet Quintilian stressed that goodness must necessarily take precedence over skill:

> . . . that an orator should be a <u>good man</u>, is naturally of more estimation and importance than the other. It is of importance that an orator should be good, because, should the power of speaking be a support to evil, nothing would be more pernicious than eloquence alike to public concerns and private, and I myself, who, as far as is in my power, strive to contribute something to the faculty of the orator, should deserve very ill of the world, since I should furnish arms, not for soldiers, but for robbers. (347).

Clearly, Quintilian would have held the teacher who taught the student to speak well, but not to use that power for good purposes, responsible if that student were to consciously use his or her skill as a speaker to mislead people.

Certainly teachers do not have the power to force students to do what is right--only the student can make that choice. But does that relieve the teacher of a moral obligation to attempt to teach students what is right? Are teachers ethically entitled to be no more than moderators? Quintilian would say no. In fact he cautions parents that "the morals [of professors] must first be ascertained" (299).

Quintilian was not unrealistic; he acknowledges that "there [may] be the same portion of ability, diligence, and attainments, in the worst man as in the best," however, "which of the two, even under that supposition, will prove the better orator? He, doubtless, who is the better man" (348).

* * *

The voices of current theorists have equally strong opinions concerning the writing teacher's role. Ken Macrorie constantly speaks of truth and truth telling with a vehemence not unlike Plato's centuries earlier. And Win Horner states in her textbook, Rhetoric in the Classical Tradition, which is currently much in use:

> Rhetoric can always be used for evil ends; thus the true integrity of the writer or orator becomes paramount. There is no way to guard against an evil person using rhetoric for bad purposes, therefore, as readers, and listeners you need to measure the person who speaks or writes as carefully as possible. (56)

Tobin reminds us that "we . . . pretend we can willingly suspend [our] beliefs and disbeliefs. We see ourselves as neutral, objective open-minded" (336). But is such a stance either possible or appropriate? According to Isocrates, "The highest praise should go to those who unite philosophy and rhetoric, the inner and outer man, because they 'never speak without weighing their words'" (45). But is that approach possible either? All teachers have their own ethos and only he they can determine what ethical stance is best for them. However, can't we all agree that it is a position that must be questioned rather than blindly acquired ? My friend who taught her students that fallacies were often very persuasive, may have

sincerely felt her role in the classroom was that of moderator. She merely provided the tool; she did none of the shaping. Or perhaps she simply neglected to question an issue which it is certainly more comfortable to leave unquestioned. And perhaps teachers do not have the right to shape or attempt to shape their students morals. But don't we have the obligation to ask ourselves why?

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